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Fiftieth session
(Provisional Agenda item 6(a))

COOPERATION IN THE FIELD OF TRANSPORT

(Commission decision G (49))

Report by the Executive Secretary

ADDENDUM

INTERIM REPORT ON THE PREPARATORY WORK OF THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON TRANSPORT AND THE ENVIRONMENT

MANDATE

1. At its forty-ninth session, the Commission adopted decision G (49) by which it agreed that a Regional Conference on Transport and the Environment should take place in 1996 under its auspices. It also agreed to the setting up of a Preparatory Committee at experts level to deal with the substantive and organizational aspects of the preparatory process, and requested the Committee to submit an interim report on the results achieved especially with regard to the envisaged topics for discussion by the Conference, its possible output and its organization and financing.

2. The present status report responds to the above-mentioned request and presents the work achieved by the Preparatory Committee since its establishment in June 1994. It also contains a preliminary outlook of its future work.

WORK OF THE PREPARATORY COMMITTEE

3. The Preparatory Committee has so far held four sessions (20 June 1994, 21-24 November 1994, 12-13 January 1995, 16-17 February 1995). Twenty-nine ECE member countries, the European Union, four UN specialized agencies, two

intergovernmental organizations and four non-governmental organizations were represented at these sessions. The reports of the meetings are contained in documents ECE/RCTE/PC/1, 8, 14 and 16 respectively.

4. The Preparatory Committee elected as its Chairman Mr. S. Schimming (Germany). Mr. B. Gauvin (France) and Mr. V.Donchenko (Russian Federation) were elected Vice-Chairpersons of the Committee. A third Vice-Chairperson is still to be elected.

5. The Preparatory Committee decided on its working modalities, contained in document ECE/RCTE/PC/L.2, which are basically those of the Commission. It also adopted a tentative list of meetings covering the years 1994, 1995 and part of 1996 (document ECE/RCTE/PC/L.5).

6. In order to have available a sound basis for substantive discussion, the Preparatory Committee adopted a questionnaire concerning the transport areas of major environmental concern and priorities of related activities for ECE member Governments, the data available on the impacts of transport on the environment and the measures already adopted, under consideration or projected by ECE member Governments to reduce such impacts.

7. Replies to the questionnaire, which was sent to all ECE member Governments, have so far been received from the following 34 Governments: Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Canada, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, United Kingdom and Ukraine.

8. The replies of Governments were summarized by the secretariat in documents ECE/RCTE/PC/4/Rev.1 and Corr.1 and ECE/RCTE/PC/5/Rev.1. The replies concerning measures adopted, under consideration or projected by Governments were also reproduced in their entirety in documents ECE/RCTE/PC/5/Adds.1 to 6. The replies concerning data and forecasts related to the impacts of transport on the environment will be considered at a later stage.

9. The Committee focused its discussion in the two following main directions: identification of the topics and measures to be addressed by the Conference, and possible outcome of the Conference. Organizational matters, including financing of the preparatory work, were also discussed.

A. Topics and measures to be addressed by the Conference

10. On the basis of the replies summarized in document ECE/RCTE/PC/4/Rev.1 and Corr.1 and the ensuing discussion in the Preparatory Committee, the modes of transport and their respective environmental impacts which were important from the standpoint of the Preparatory Committee were identified, as well as the issues which should be addressed by the Conference.

11. Concerning the modes of transport and their environmental impacts which were considered important for the Conference, it appeared that in the view of ECE Governments:

the most important transport mode to be dealt with by the Conference was, by far, road transport, followed by rail and air transport, while

maritime transport and inland water transport were considered as less relevant;

the Conference should address not only the main environmental impacts of road transport but also those of the other transport modes, for which purpose the international organizations concerned should participate in the work of the Committee;

within road transport, the most significant environmental impacts were air pollution followed by noise and vibration and accidents involving dangerous goods; in rail transport, the main concerns were noise and vibrations as well as accidents involving dangerous goods; in air transport, noise and vibration led the list of the preoccupations, followed by air pollution; finally, in maritime and inland water transport, accidents involving dangerous goods and water pollution by vessels were considered as the most important issues;

the most important impacts from the standpoint of the Preparatory Committee were, in order of priority, the following:

- air pollution, noise and vibrations and accidents involving dangerous goods in road transport;
- noise and vibrations in air transport;
- land taking in road transport;
- air pollution from air transport;
- noise and vibrations and accidents involving dangerous goods in rail transport;
- water and soil pollution in road transport;
- accidents involving dangerous goods in maritime transport.

12. With regard to the most important issues to be addressed by the Conference, the following were the most frequently mentioned in the replies:

- Implementation of existing international regulations on vehicles' pollutants and noise emissions;
- Promotion of environmentally sound transport modes (combined transport, public passenger transport in urban areas, etc.);
- Reduction of energy consumption of vehicles;
- Reconciliation of transport objectives of economic development and environmental protection in market economies;
- Use of economic instruments (incentives, taxes, etc.) to reduce the environmental impact of transport.

13. The synthesis of the replies contained in document ECE/RCTE/PC/5 and Rev.1 gave rise to a substantive discussion on the identification of objectives and measures which could be commonly accepted by all ECE member Governments. The synthesis showed that a number of Governments were already pursuing transport policies aimed at developing transport, while at the same time taking measures to minimize their environmental impacts, and had developed strategies to reconcile the sometimes divergent objectives involved.

14. On the basis of the synthesis, the Government of France prepared a proposal on "Draft guidelines for a common strategy regarding transport and the environment", which received wide support from the Preparatory Committee and which was subsequently revised with the comments and suggestions made by a

large number of delegations. The final version so far, contained in document ECE/RCTE/PC/10/Rev.2, received extensive agreement, although a few parts, in brackets, need further discussion. The document outlines five substantive areas to be addressed by the Conference and general action-oriented guidelines for each of these areas.

B. Possible outcome of the Conference

15. A number of general orientations related to the possible output of the Conference were highlighted during the meetings of the Committee as follows:

The Conference should provide added values to the results already achieved in the areas concerned in other fora;

The Conference should encourage the implementation of the existing legal instruments not unanimously applied in Europe;

Special attention should be paid to countries in transition for which transitional periods may need to be established for the implementation of the decisions taken at the Conference;

The policies and measures adopted should be cost-effective and avoid distortion in competition conditions.

16. Concerning the format and the types of outcome to be expected from the Conference, the Preparatory Committee discussed three possibilities:

A legally-binding instrument, (including a possible amendment to the 1968 Vienna Convention with a view to the establishment of environmental standards in international traffic);

A programme of action which would include concrete activities and measures requiring further consideration, including through dialogue and cooperation among ECE member States, if possible within a fixed time-limit;

A political declaration.

17. It has to be noted that among the countries participating in the sessions of the Preparatory Committee, views were divergent on the feasibility of achieving a legally binding commitment including the amendment of the 1968 Vienna Convention. In this respect, several countries felt that the levels of outcome could be decided only when the requirements to be satisfied in the various areas addressed would be further defined.

C. Organizational matters

18. The Preparatory Committee considered the date and venue of the Conference and noted that, while interest had been shown by several Governments, no country had thus far expressed its intention to host the Conference. If there was no change in the situation the Commission might wish to decide to organize it in Geneva within the ECE regular budget. For this purpose the week from 30 September to 4 October 1996 has been reserved tentatively. Such a decision might be taken at a formal session of the Commission to be called during one of its informal sessions in autumn this year.

19. The Preparatory Committee considered the question of funding of the preparatory work for the Conference and took note of the need to provide a support to the secretariat for this work. It also took note of the establishment of a Trust Fund for Supporting ECE Regional Conferences and Meetings, including Preparatory Meetings for Global Conferences, which would be used for this purpose. Governments were informed by a letter of the Executive Secretary of the estimated resources required for the financing of the preparatory process, their expected use and the procedures to be followed for contributions.

OUTLOOK FOR FUTURE WORK

20. At this stage of the preparatory process, it is expected that the Preparatory Committee will organize its future work along the following lines:

(a) to develop further document ECE/RCTE/PC/10/Rev.2 to achieve consensus;

(b) to go deeper into the substantive aspects of the five clusters of issues as defined in that document and to supplement them with concrete measures, initiatives and programmes to achieve the objectives included in the draft Guidelines;

(c) on this basis, to identify the issues on which binding agreement or commitments of individual Governments could be achieved and those which need to be considered further in the context of a Programme of Action;

(d) to propose a format for the possible outcome of the Conference, including the degree and nature of the commitments to be taken according to the decisions envisaged in each of the areas concerned, and to prepare appropriate final documents;

(e) to elaborate the programme of the Conference and to identify the appropriate speakers.

21. The Preparatory Committee will also have to examine the question of the venue of the Conference and other organizational aspects related thereto.

22. The Preparatory Committee will keep the Commission informed at its informal sessions about the progress of its work to enable it to give advice or to instruct the Preparatory Committee on questions which could not be resolved during its discussions, especially if such decisions need political assessment or high level expertise.